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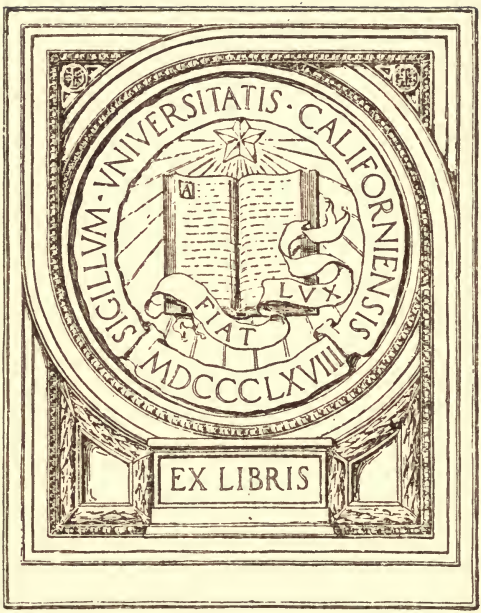
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THE TOWN DOWN THE RIVER

A BOOK OF POEMS

BY

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

NEW YORK
CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS
1910

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CONTENTS

PAGE

THE MASTER 1

THE TOWN DOWN THE RIVER 9

AN ISLAND 23

CALVERLY'S—

CALVERLY'S 41

LEFFINGWELL—

I. THE LURE. 44

II. THE QUICKSTEP. 46

III. REQUIESCAT 48

CLAVERING 50

LINGARD AND THE STARS. 54

MISCELLANEOUS—

PASA THALASSA THALASSA 59

MOMUS 64

UNCLE ANANIAS 66

THE WHIP 68

PAGE

THE WHITE LIGHTS 71

EXIT 73

NORMANDY 74

LEONORA 76

THE WISE BROTHERS 78

BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD 80

AU REVOIR 83

FOR ARVIA 85

THE SUNKEN CROWN 87

DOCTOR OF BILLIARDS 89

SHADRACH O'LEARY 91

HOW ANNANDALE WENT OUT 93

ALMA MATER 95

MINIVER CHEEVY 97

THE PILOT 100

VICKERY'S MOUNTAIN 102

BON VOYAGE 106

THE COMPANION 109

ATHERTON'S GAMBIT 111

FOR A DEAD LADY 114

TWO GARDENS IN LINNDALE 116

THE REVEALER 123

THE MASTER

THE MASTER *

(LINCOLN)

A flying word from here and there
Had sown the name at which we sneered,
But soon the name was everywhere,
To be reviled and then revered:
A presence to be loved and feared,
We cannot hide it, or deny
That we, the gentlemen who jeered,
May be forgotten by and by.

* Supposed to have been written not long after the Civil War.

He came when days were perilous
And hearts of men were sore beguiled;
And having made his note of us,
He pondered and was reconciled.
Was ever master yet so mild
As he, and so untamable?
We doubted, even when he smiled,
Not knowing what he knew so well.

He knew that undeceiving fate
Would shame us whom he served unsought;
He knew that he must wince and wait—
The jest of those for whom he fought;
He knew devoutly what he thought
Of us and of our ridicule;
He knew that we must all be taught
Like little children in a school.

We gave a glamour to the task
That he encountered and saw through,
But little of us did he ask,
And little did we ever do.
And what appears if we review
The season when we railed and chaffed?
It is the face of one who knew
That we were learning while we laughed.

The face that in our vision feels
Again the venom that we flung,
Transfigured to the world reveals
The vigilance to which we clung.
Shrewd, hallowed, harassed, and among
The mysteries that are untold,
The face we see was never young
Nor could it ever have been old.

For he, to whom we had applied
Our shopman's test of age and worth,
Was elemental when he died,
As he was ancient at his birth:
The saddest among kings of earth,
Bowed with a galling crown, this man
Met rancor with a cryptic mirth,
Laconic—and Olympian.

The love, the grandeur, and the fame
Are bounded by the world alone;
The calm, the smouldering, and the flame
Of awful patience were his own:
With him they are forever flown
Past all our fond self-shadowings,
Wherewith we cumber the Unknown
As with inept, Icarian wings.

For we were not as other men:
'Twas ours to soar and his to see·
But we are coming down again,
And we shall come down pleasantly;
Nor shall we longer disagree
On what it is to be sublime,
But flourish in our perigee
And have one Titan at a time.

THE TOWN DOWN THE RIVER

THE TOWN DOWN THE RIVER

I

Said the Watcher by the Way
To the young and the unladen,
To the boy and to the maiden,
"God be with you both to-day.
First your song came ringing,
Now you come, you two,—
Knowing naught of what you do,
Or of what your dreams are bringing.

"Oh you children who go singing
To the Town down the River,
Where the millions cringe and shiver,
Tell me what you know to-day;
Tell me how far you are going,
Tell me how you find your way.
O you children who go dreaming,
Tell me what you dream to-day."

"He is old and we have heard him,"
Said the boy then to the maiden;
"He is old and heavy laden
With a load we throw away.
Care may come to find us,
Age may lay us low;
Still, we seek the light we know,
And the dead we leave behind us.

"Did he think that he would blind us
Into such a small believing
As to live without achieving,
When the lights have led so far?
Let him watch or let him wither,—
Shall he tell us where we are?
We know best who go together,
Downward, onward, and so far."

II

Said the Watcher by the Way
To the fiery folk that hastened,
To the loud and the unchastened,
"You are strong, I see, to-day.
Strength and hope may lead you
To the journey's end,—
Each to be the other's friend
If the Town should fail to need you.

"And are ravens there to feed you
In the Town down the River,
Where the gift appalls the giver
And youth hardens day by day?
O you brave and you unshaken,
Are you truly on your way?
And are sirens in the River,
That you come so far to-day?"

"You are old, and we have listened,"
Said the voice of one who halted;
"You are sage and self-exalted,
But your way is not our way.
You that cannot aid us
Give us words to eat.
Be assured that they are sweet,
And that we are as God made us.

"Not in vain have you delayed us,
Though the River still be calling
Through the twilight that is falling
And the Town be still so far.
By the whirlwind of your wisdom
Leagues are lifted as leaves are;
But a king without a kingdom
Fails us, who have come so far."

III

Said the Watcher by the Way
To the slower folk who stumbled,
To the weak and the world-humbled,
"Tell me how you fare to-day.
Some with ardor shaken,
All with honor scarred,
Do you falter, finding hard
The far chance that you have taken?

"Or, do you at length awaken
To an antic retribution,
Goading to a new confusion
The drugged hopes of yesterday?
O you poor mad men that hobble,
Will you not return, or stay?
Do you trust, you broken people,
To a dawn without the day?"

"You speak well of what you know not,"
Muttered one; and then a second:
"You have begged and you have beckoned,
But you see us on our way.
Who are you to scold us,
Knowing what we know?
Jeremiah, long ago,
Said as much as you have told us.

"As we are, then, you behold us:
Derelicts of all conditions,
Poets, rogues, and sick physicians,
Plodding forward from afar;
Forward now into the darkness
Where the men before us are;
Forward, onward, out of grayness,
To the light that shone so far."

IV

Said the Watcher by the Way
To some aged ones who lingered,
To the shrunken, the claw-fingered,
"So you come for me to-day."—
"Yes, to give you warning;
You are old," one said;
"You have old hairs on your head,
Fit for laurel, not for scorning.

"From the first of early morning
We have toiled along to find you;
We, as others, have maligned you,
But we need your scorn to-day.
By the light that we saw shining,
Let us not be lured alway;
Let us hear no River calling
When to-morrow is to-day."

"But your lanterns are unlighted
And the Town is far before you:
Let us hasten, I implore you,"
Said the Watcher by the Way.
"Long have I waited,
Longer have I known
That the Town would have its own,
And the call be for the fated.

"In the name of all created,
Let us hear no more, my brothers;
Are we older than all others?
Are the planets in our way?"—
"Hark," said one; "I hear the River,
Calling always, night and day."—
"Forward, then! The lights are shining,"
Said the Watcher by the Way.

AN ISLAND

AN ISLAND

(SAINT HELENA, 1821)

Take it away, and swallow it yourself.
Ha! Look you, there's a rat.
Last night there were a dozen on that shelf,
And two of them were living in my hat.
Look! Now he goes, but he'll come back—
Ha? But he will, I say . . .
Il reviendra-z-à Pâques,
Ou à la Trinité . . .
Be very sure that he'll return again;

For said the Lord: Imprimis, we have rats,
And having rats, we have rain.—
So on the seventh day
He rested, and made Pain.
—Man, if you love the Lord, and if the Lord
Love liars, I will have you at your word
And swallow it. *Voilà.* Bah!

Where do I say it is
That I have lain so long?
Where do I count myself among the dead,
As once above the living and the strong?
And what is this that comes and goes,
Fades and swells and overflows,
Like music underneath and overhead?
What is it in me now that rings and roars
Like fever-laden wine?

What ruinous tavern-shine
Is this that lights me far from worlds and wars
And women that were mine?
Where do I say it is
That Time has made my bed?
What lowering outland hostelry is this
For one the stars have disinherited?

An island, I have said:
A peak, where fiery dreams and far desires
Are rained on, like old fires:
A vermin region by the stars abhorred,
Where falls the flaming word
By which I consecrate with unsuccess
An acreage of God's forgetfulness,
Left here above the foam and long ago
Made right for my duress;

Where soon the sea,
My foaming and long-clamoring enemy,
Will have within the cryptic, old embrace
Of her triumphant arms—a memory.
Why then, the place?
What forage of the sky or of the shore
Will make it any more,
To me, than my award of what was left
Of number, time, and space?

And what is on me now that I should heed
The durance or the silence or the scorn?
I was the gardener who had the seed
Which holds within its heart the food and fire
That gives to man a glimpse of his desire;
And I have tilled, indeed,
Much land, where men may say that I have plante

Unsparingly my corn—
For a world harvest-haunted
And for a world unborn.
Meanwhile, am I to view, as at a play,
Through smoke the funeral flames of yesterday,
And think them far away?
Am I to doubt and yet be given to know
That where my demon guides me, there I go?—
An island? Be it so.
For islands, after all is said and done,
Tell but a wilder game that was begun,
When Fate, the mistress of iniquities,
The mad Queen-spinner of all discrepancies,
Beguiled the dyers of the dawn that day,
And even in such a curst and sodden way
Made my three colors one.

—So be it, and the way be as of old:
So be the weary truth again retold
Of great kings overthrown
Because they would be kings, and lastly kings alone.
Fling to each dog his bone.

Flags that are vanished, flags that are soiled and furled,
Say what will be the word when I am gone:
What learned little acrid archive men
Will burrow to find me out and burrow again,—
But all for naught, unless
To find there was another Island . . . Yes,
There are too many islands in this world,
There are too many rats, and there is too much rain.
So three things are made plain
Between the sea and sky:

Three separate parts of one thing, which is Pain . . .
Bah, what a way to die!—
To leave my Queen still spinning there on high,
Still wondering, I dare say,
To see me in this way . . .
Madame a sa tour monte
Si haut qu'elle peut monter—
Like one of our Commissioners . . . *ai! ai!*
Prometheus and the women have to cry,
But no, not I . . .
Faugh, what a way to die!

But who are these that come and go
Before me, shaking laurel as they pass?
Laurel, to make me know
For certain what they mean:
That now my Fate, my Queen,

Having found that she, by way of right reward,
Will after madness go remembering,
And laurel be as grass,—
Remembers the one thing
That she has left to bring.
The floor about me now is like a sward
Grown royally. Now it is like a sea
That heaves with laurel heavily,
Surrendering an outworn enmity
For what has come to be.

—But not for *you,*
No, not for you, returning with your curled
And haggish lips. And why are you alone?
Why do you stay when all the rest are gone?
Why do you bring those treacherous eyes that reek
With venom and hate the while you seek

To make me understand?—
Laurel from every land,
Laurel, but not the world?

Fury, or perjured Fate, or whatsoever,
Tell me the bloodshot word that is your name
And I will pledge remembrance of the same
That shall be crossed out never;
Whereby posterity
May know, being told, that you have come to me,
You and your tongueless train without a sound,
With covetous hands and eyes and laurel all around,
Foreshowing your endeavor
To mirror me the demon of my days,
To make me doubt him, loathe him, face to face.
Bowed with unwilling glory from the quest
That was ordained and manifest,

You shake it off and wish me joy of it?

Laurel from every place,

Laurel, but not the rest?

Such are the words in you that I divine,

Such are the words of men.

So be it, and what then?

Poor, tottering counterfeit,

Are you a thing to tell me what is mine?

Grant we the demon sees

An inch beyond the line,

What comes of mine and thine?

A thousand here and there may shriek and freeze,

Or they may starve in fine.

The Old Physician has a crimson cure

For such as these,

And ages after ages will endure

The minims of it that are victories.
The wreath may go from brow to brow,
The state may flourish, flame, and cease;
But through the fury and the flood somehow
The demons are acquainted and at ease,
And somewhat hard to please.
Mine, I believe, is laughing at me now
In his primordial way,
Quite as he laughed of old at Hannibal,
Or rather at Alexander, let us say.
Therefore, be what you may,
Time has no further need
Of you, or of your breed.
My demon, irretrievably astray,
Has ruined the last chorus of a play
That will, so he avers, be played again some day;

And you, poor glowering ghost,
Have staggered under laurel here to boast
Above me, dying, while you lean
In triumph awkward and unclean,
About some words of his that you have read?
Thing, do I not know them all?
He tells me how the storied leaves that fall
Are tramped on, being dead?
They are sometimes: with a storm foul enough
They are seized alive and they are blown far off
To mould on islands.—What else have you read?
He tells me that great kings look very small
When they are put to bed;
And this being said,
He tells me that the battles I have won
Are not my own,

But his—howbeit fame will yet atone
For all defect, and sheave the mystery:
The follies and the slaughters I have done
Are mine alone,
And so far History.
So be the tale again retold
And leaf by clinging leaf unrolled
Where I have written in the dawn,
With ink that fades anon,
Like Cæsar's, and the way be as of old.

Ho, is it you? I thought you were a ghost.
Is it time for you to poison me again?
Well, here's our friend the rain,—
Mironton, mironton, mirontaine . . .
Man, I could murder you almost,
You with your pills and toast.

Take it away and eat it, and shoot rats.

Ha! there he comes. Your rat will never fail,

My punctual assassin, to prevail—

While he has power to crawl,

Or teeth to gnaw withal—

Where kings are caged. Why has a king no cats?

What!—

You say that I'll achieve it if I try?

Swallow it?—No, not I . . .

God, what a way to die!

CALVERLY'S

CALVERLY'S

We go no more to Calverly's,
For there the lights are few and low;
And who are there to see by them,
Or what they see, we do not know.
Poor strangers of another tongue
May now creep in from anywhere,
And we, forgotten, be no more
Than twilight on a ruin there.

We two, the remnant. All the rest
Are cold and quiet. You nor I,
Nor fiddle now, nor flagon-lid,
May ring them back from where they lie.
No fame delays oblivion
For them, but something yet survives:
A record written fair, could we
But read the book of scattered lives.

There'll be a page for Leffingwell,
And one for Lingard, the Moon-calf;
And who knows what for Clavering,
Who died because he couldn't laugh?
Who knows or cares? No sign is here,
No face, no voice, no memory;
No Lingard with his eerie joy,
No Clavering, no Calverly.

We cannot have them here with us
To say where their light lives are gone,
Or if they be of other stuff
Than are the moons of Ilion.
So, be their place of one estate
With ashes, echoes, and old wars,—
Or ever we be of the night,
Or we be lost among the stars.

LEFFINGWELL

I—THE LURE

No, no,—forget your Cricket and your Ant,
For I shall never set my name to theirs
That now bespeak the very sons and heirs
Incarnate of Queen Gossip and King Cant.
The case of Leffingwell is mixed, I grant,
And futile seems the burden that he bears;
But are we sounding his forlorn affairs
Who brand him parasite and sycophant?

I tell you, Leffingwell was more than these;
And if he prove a rather sorry knight,
What quiverings in the distance of what light
May not have lured him with high promises,
And then gone down?—He may have been deceived;
He may have lied,—he did; and he believed.

LEFFINGWELL

II—THE QUICKSTEP

The dirge is over, the good work is done,
All as he would have had it, and we go;
And we who leave him say we do not know
How much is ended or how much begun.
So men have said before of many a one;
So men may say of us when Time shall throw
Such earth as may be needful to bestow
On you and me the covering hush we shun.

Well hated, better loved, he played and lost,
And left us; and we smile at his arrears;
And who are we to know what it all cost,
Or what we may have wrung from him, the buyer?
The pageant of his failure-laden years
Told ruin of high price. The place was higher.

LEFFINGWELL

III—REQUIESCAT

We never knew the sorrow or the pain
Within him, for he seemed as one asleep—
Until he faced us with a dying leap,
And with a blast of paramount, profane,
And vehement valediction did explain
To each of us, in words that we shall keep,
Why we were not to wonder or to weep,
Or ever dare to wish him back again.

He may be now an amiable shade,
With merry fellow-phantoms unafraid
Around him—but we do not ask. We know
That he would rise and haunt us horribly,
And be with us o' nights of a certainty.
Did we not hear him when he told us so?

CLAVERING

I say no more for Clavering
  Than I should say of him who fails
To bring his wounded vessel home
  When reft of rudder and of sails;

I say no more than I should say
  Of any other one who sees
Too far for guidance of to-day,
  Too near for the eternities.

I think of him as I should think
Of one who for scant wages played,
And faintly, a flawed instrument
That fell while it was being made;

I think of him as one who fared,
Unfaltering and undeceived,
Amid mirages of renown
And urgings of the unachieved;

I think of him as one who gave
To Lingard leave to be amused,
And listened with a patient grace
That we, the wise ones, had refused;

I think of metres that he wrote
For Cubit, the ophidian guest:
"What Lilith, or Dark Lady" . . . Well,
Time swallows Cubit with the rest.

I think of last words that he said
One midnight over Calverly:
"Good-by—good man." He was not good;
So Clavering was wrong, you see.

I wonder what had come to pass
Could he have borrowed for a spell
The fiery-frantic indolence
That made a ghost of Leffingwell;

I wonder if he pitied us
Who cautioned him till he was gray
To build his house with ours on earth
And have an end of yesterday;

I wonder what it was we saw
To make us think that we were strong;
I wonder if he saw too much,
Or if he looked one way too long.

But when were thoughts or wonderings
To ferret out the man within?
Why prate of what he seemed to be,
And all that he might not have been?

He clung to phantoms and to friends,
And never came to anything.
He left a wreath on Cubit's grave.
I say no more for Clavering.

LINGARD AND THE STARS

The table hurled itself, to our surprise,
At Lingard, and anon rapped eagerly:
"When earth is cold and there is no more sea,
There will be what was Lingard. Otherwise,
Why lure the race to ruin through the skies?
And why have Leffingwell, or Calverly?"—
"I wish the ghost would give his name," said he;
And searching gratitude was in his eyes.

He stood then by the window for a time,
And only after the last midnight chime
Smote the day dead did he say anything:
"Come out, my little one, the stars are bright;
Come out, you lælaps, and inhale the night."
And so he went away with Clavering.

MISCELLANEOUS

PASA THALASSA THALASSA

"The sea is everywhere the sea."

I

Gone—faded out of the story, the sea-faring friend I remember?

Gone for a decade, they say: never a word or a sign.

Gone with his hard red face that only his laughter could wrinkle,

Down where men go to be still, by the old way of the sea.

Never again will he come, with rings in his ears like a pirate,

Back to be living and seen, here with his roses and vines;

Here where the tenants are shadows and echoes of years uneventful,

Memory meets the event, told from afar by the sea.

Smoke that floated and rolled in the twilight away from the chimney

Floats and rolls no more. Wheeling and falling, instead,

Down with a twittering flash go the smooth and inscrutable swallows,

Down to the place made theirs by the cold work of the sea.

Roses have had their day, and the dusk is on yarrow and wormwood—

Dusk that is over the grass, drenched with memorial dew;

Trellises lie like bones in a ruin that once was a garden,

Swallows have lingered and ceased, shadows and echoes are all.

II

Where is he lying to-night, as I turn away down to the valley,

Down where the lamps of men tell me the streets are alive?

Where shall I ask, and of whom, in the town or on land or on water,

News of a time and a place buried alike and with him?

Few now remain who may care, nor may they be wiser for caring,

Where or what manner the doom, whether by day or by night;

Whether in Indian deeps or on flood-laden fields of Atlantis,

Or by the roaring Horn, shrouded in silence he lies.

Few now remain who return by the weed-weary path
to his cottage,

Drawn by the scene as it was—met by the chill and
the change;

Few are alive who report, and few are alive who re-
member,

More of him now than a name carved somewhere on
the sea.

"Where is he lying?" I ask, and the lights in the valley
are nearer;

Down to the streets I go, down to the murmur of
men.

Down to the roar of the sea in a ship may be well for
another—

Down where he lies to-night, silent, and under the
storms.

MOMUS

"Where's the need of singing now?"—
Smooth your brow,
Momus, and be reconciled,
For King Kronos is a child—
Child and father,
Or god rather,
And all gods are wild.

"Who reads Byron any more?"—
Shut the door,
Momus, for I feel a draught;

Shut it quick, for some one laughed.—
"What's become of
Browning? Some of
Wordsworth lumbers like a raft?

"What are poets to find here?"—
Have no fear:
When the stars are shining blue
There will yet be left a few
Themes availing—
And these failing,
Momus, there'll be you.

UNCLE ANANIAS

His words were magic and his heart was true,
  And everywhere he wandered he was blessed.
Out of all ancient men my childhood knew
  I choose him and I mark him for the best.
Of all authoritative liars, too,
  I crown him loveliest.

How fondly I remember the delight
  That always glorified him in the spring;
The joyous courage and the benedight
  Profusion of his faith in everything!
He was a good old man, and it was right
  That he should have his fling.

And often, underneath the apple-trees,
When we surprised him in the summer time,
With what superb magnificence and ease
He sinned enough to make the day sublime!
And if he liked us there about his knees,
Truly it was no crime.

All summer long we loved him for the same
Perennial inspiration of his lies;
And when the russet wealth of autumn came,
There flew but fairer visions to our eyes—
Multiple, tropical, winged with a feathery flame,
Like birds of paradise.

So to the sheltered end of many a year
He charmed the seasons out with pageantry,
Wearing upon his forehead, with no fear,
The laurel of approved iniquity.
And every child who knew him, far or near,
Did love him faithfully.

THE WHIP

The doubt you fought so long,
The cynic net you cast,
The tyranny, the wrong,
The ruin, they are past;
And here you are at last,
Your blood no longer vexed.
The coffin has you fast,
The clod will have you next.

But fear you not the clod,
Nor ever doubt the grave:
The roses and the sod
Will not forswear the wave.
The gift the river gave
Is now but theirs to cover:
The mistress and the slave
Are gone now, and the lover.

You left the two to find
Their own way to the brink:
Then—shall I call you blind?—
You chose to plunge and sink.
God knows the gall we drink
Is not the mead we cry for,
Nor was it, I should think—
For you—a thing to die for.

Could we have done the same,
Had we been in your place?—
This funeral of your name
Throws no light on the case.—
Could we have made the chase,
And felt then as you felt?—
But what's this on your face,
Blue, curious, like a welt?

There were some ropes of sand
Recorded long ago,
But none, I understand,
Of water. Is it so?
And she—she struck the blow,
You but a neck behind. . .
You saw the river flow—
Still, shall I call you blind?

THE WHITE LIGHTS

(BROADWAY, 1906)

When in from Delos came the gold
That held the dream of Pericles,
When first Athenian ears were told
The tumult of Euripides,
When men met Aristophanes,
Who fledged them with immortal quills—
Here, where the time knew none of these,
There were some islands and some hills.

When Rome went ravening to see
The sons of mothers end their days,
When Flaccus bade Leuconoë
To banish her Chaldean ways,
When first the pearled, alembic phrase
Of Maro into music ran—
Here there was neither blame nor praise
For Rome, or for the Mantuan.

When Avon, like a faery floor,
Lay freighted, for the eyes of One,
With galleons laden long before
By moonlit wharves in Avalon—
Here, where the white lights have begun
To seethe a way for something fair,
No prophet knew, from what was done,
That there was triumph in the air.

EXIT

For what we owe to other days,
Before we poisoned him with praise,
May we who shrank to find him weak
Remember that he cannot speak.

For envy that we may recall,
And for our faith before the fall,
May we who are alive be slow
To tell what we shall never know.

For penance he would not confess,
And for the fateful emptiness
Of early triumph undermined,
May we now venture to be kind.

NORMANDY

(From the French of Bérat)

When all the land's alive again
With winter far away,
And heaven over France again
Is fairer than to-day,
When spring puts off her gray for green,
And swallows all return—
Then I'll go back to Normandy,
The land where I was born.

I know the fields of Switzerland,
The peaks and icy meres;
I know the skies of Italy,
I know the gondoliers;
But let me wander where I will,
I say that I'll return
To Normandy, my Normandy,
The land where I was born.

At last there comes a time to us
When all dreams lose their glow;
There comes a time when in our souls
We need the long ago;
So when my songs are cold in me,
And love will not return—
Then I'll go back to Normandy,
The land where I was born.

LEONORA

They have made for Leonora this low dwelling in the ground,

And with cedar they have woven the four walls round.

Like a little dryad hiding she'll be wrapped all in green,

Better kept and longer valued than by ways that would have been.

They will come with many roses in the early afternoon,

They will come with pinks and lilies and with Leonora soon;

And as long as beauty's garments over beauty's limbs are thrown,

There'll be lilies that are liars, and the rose will have its own.

There will be a wondrous quiet in the house that they
have made,
And to-night will be a darkness in the place where she'll
be laid;
But the builders, looking forward into time, could only
see
Darker nights for Leonora than to-night shall ever be.

THE WISE BROTHERS

FIRST VOICE

So long adrift, so fast aground,
What foam and ruin have we found—
    We, the Wise Brothers?
Could heaven and earth be framed amiss,
That we should land in fine like this—
    We, and no others?

SECOND VOICE

Convoyed by what accursèd thing
Made we this evil reckoning—
    We, the Wise Brothers?

And if the failure be complete,
Why look we forward from defeat—
We, and what others?

THIRD VOICE

Blown far from harbors once in sight,
May we not, going far, go right,—
We, the Wise Brothers?
Companioned by the whirling spheres,
Have we no more than what appears—
We, and all others?

BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD

"There, but for the grace of God, goes . . ."

There is a question that I ask,
And ask again:
What hunger was half-hidden by the mask
That he wore then?

There was a word for me to say
That I said not;
And in the past there was another day
That I forgot:

A dreary, cold, unwholesome day,
Racked overhead,—
As if the world were turning the wrong way,
And the sun dead:

A day that comes back well enough
Now he is gone.
What then? Has memory no other stuff
To seize upon?

Wherever he may wander now
In his despair,
Would he be more contented in the slough
If all were there?

And yet he brought a kind of light
Into the room;
And when he left, a tinge of something bright
Survived the gloom.

Why will he not be where he is,
And not with me?
The hours that are my life are mine, not his,—
Or used to be.

What numerous imps invisible
Has he at hand,
Far-flying and forlorn as what they tell
At his command?

What hold of weirdness or of worth
Can he possess,
That he may speak from anywhere on earth
His loneliness?

Shall I be caught and held again
In the old net?—
He brought a sorry sunbeam with him then,
But it beams yet.

AU REVOIR

(MARCH 23, 1909.)

What libellers of destiny
Are these who are afraid
That something yet without a name
Will seize him in the shade?

Though fever-demons may compound
Their most malefic brew,
No fever can defeat the man
Who still has work to do;

Though mighty lions walk about,
Inimical to see,
No lion yet was ever fed
On things that are to be.

Wherefore, and of necessity,
Will he meet what may come;
And from a nation will be missed
As others are from home.

FOR ARVIA

ON HER FIFTH BIRTHDAY

You Eyes, you large and all-inquiring Eyes,
That look so dubiously into me,
And are not satisfied with what you see,
Tell me the worst and let us have no lies:
Tell me the secret of your scrutinies,
And of myself. Am I a Mystery?
Am I a Boojum—or just Company?
What do you say? What do you think, You Eyes?

You say not; but you think, beyond a doubt;
And you have the whole world to think about,
With very little time for little things.
So let it be; and let it all be fair—
For you, and for the rest who cannot share
Your gold of unrevealed awakenings.

THE SUNKEN CROWN

Nothing will hold him longer—let him go;
Let him go down where others have gone down;
Little he cares whether we smile or frown,
Or if we know, or if we think we know.
The call is on him for his overthrow,
Say we; so let him rise, or let him drown.
Poor fool! He plunges for the sunken crown,
And we—we wait for what the plunge may show.

Well, we are safe enough. Why linger, then?
The watery chance was his, not ours. Poor fool!
Poor truant, poor Narcissus out of school;
Poor jest of Askelon; poor king of men.—
The crown, if he be wearing it, may cool
His arrogance, and he may sleep again.

DOCTOR OF BILLIARDS

Of all among the fallen from on high,
We count you last and leave you to regain
Your born dominion of a life made vain
By three spheres of insidious ivory.
You dwindle to the lesser tragedy—
Content, you say. We call, but you remain.
Nothing alive gone wrong could be so plain,
Or quite so blasted with absurdity.

You click away the kingdom that is yours,
And you click off your crown for cap and bells;
You smile, who are still master of the feast,
And for your smile we credit you the least;
But when your false, unhallowed laugh occurs,
We seem to think there may be something else.

SHADRACH O'LEARY

O'Leary was a poet—for a while:
He sang of many ladies frail and fair,
The rolling glory of their golden hair,
And emperors extinguished with a smile.
They foiled his years with many an ancient wile,
And if they limped, O'Leary didn't care:
He turned them loose and had them everywhere,
Undoing saints and senates with their guile.

But this was not the end. A year ago
I met him—and to meet was to admire:
Forgotten were the ladies and the lyre,
And the small, ink-fed Eros of his dream.
By questioning I found a man to know—
A failure spared, a Shadrach of the Gleam.

HOW ANNANDALE WENT OUT

"They called it Annandale—and I was there
To flourish, to find words, and to attend:
Liar, physician, hypocrite, and friend,
I watched him; and the sight was not so fair
As one or two that I have seen elsewhere:
An apparatus not for me to mend—
A wreck, with hell between him and the end,
Remained of Annandale; and I was there.

"I knew the ruin as I knew the man;
So put the two together, if you can,
Remembering the worst you know of me.
Now view yourself as I was, on the spot—
With a slight kind of engine. Do you see?
Like this . . . You wouldn't hang me? I thought not."

ALMA MATER

He knocked, and I beheld him at the door—
A vision for the gods to verify.
"What battered ancientry is this," thought I,
And when, if ever, did we meet before?"
But ask him as I might, I got no more
For answer than a moaning and a cry:
Too late to parley, but in time to die,
He staggered, and lay shapeless on the floor.

When had I known him? And what brought
him here?

Love, warning, malediction, hunger, fear?

Surely I never thwarted such as he?—

Again, what soiled obscurity was this:

Out of what scum, and up from what abyss,

Had they arrived—these rags of memory?

MINIVER CHEEVY

Miniver Cheevy, child of scorn,
  Grew lean while he assailed the seasons;
He wept that he was ever born,
  And he had reasons.

Miniver loved the days of old
  When swords were bright and steeds were prancing;
The vision of a warrior bold
  Would set him dancing.

Miniver sighed for what was not,
And dreamed, and rested from his labors;
He dreamed of Thebes and Camelot,
And Priam's neighbors.

Miniver mourned the ripe renown
That made so many a name so fragrant;
He mourned Romance, now on the town,
And Art, a vagrant.

Miniver loved the Medici,
Albeit he had never seen one;
He would have sinned incessantly
Could he have been one.

Miniver cursed the commonplace
And eyed a khaki suit with loathing;
He missed the mediæval grace
Of iron clothing.

Miniver scorned the gold he sought,
But sore annoyed was he without it;
Miniver thought, and thought, and thought,
And thought about it.

Miniver Cheevy, born too late,
Scratched his head and kept on thinking;
Miniver coughed, and called it fate,
And kept on drinking.

THE PILOT

From the Past and Unavailing
Out of cloudland we are steering;
After groping, after fearing,
Into starlight we come trailing,
And we find the stars are true.
Still, O comrade, what of you?
You are gone, but we are sailing,
And the old ways are all new.

For the Lost and Unreturning
We have drifted, we have waited;
Uncommanded and unrated,
We have tossed and wandered, yearning
For a charm that comes no more
From the old lights by the shore:
We have shamed ourselves in learning
What you knew so long before.

For the Breed of the Far-going
Who are strangers, and all brothers,
May forget no more than others
Who look seaward with eyes flowing.
But are brothers to bewail
One who fought so foul a gale?
You have won beyond our knowing,
You are gone, but yet we sail.

VICKERY'S MOUNTAIN

Blue in the west the mountain stands,
And through the long twilight
Vickery sits with folded hands,
And Vickery's eyes are bright.

Bright, for he knows what no man else
On earth as yet may know:
There's a golden word that he never tells,
And a gift that he will not show.

He dreams of honor and wealth and fame,
  He smiles, and well he may;
For to Vickery once a sick man came
  Who did not go away.

The day before the day to be,
  "Vickery," said the guest,
"You know as you live what's left of me—
  And you shall know the rest.

"You know as you live that I have come
  To what we call the end.
No doubt you have found me troublesome,
  But you've also found a friend;

"For we shall give and you shall take
  The gold that is in view;
The mountain there and I shall make
  A golden man of you.

"And you shall leave a friend behind
Who neither frets nor feels;
And you shall move among your kind
With hundreds at your heels.

"Now this that I have written here
Tells all that need be told;
So, Vickery, take the way that's clear,
And be a man of gold."

Vickery turned his eyes again
To the far mountain-side,
And wept a tear for worthy men
Defeated and defied.

Since then a crafty score of years
Have come, and they have gone;
But Vickery counts no lost arrears:
He lingers and lives on.

Blue in the west the mountain stands,
  Familiar as a face.
Blue, but Vickery knows what sands
  Are golden at its base.

He dreams and lives upon the day
  When he shall walk with kings.
Vickery smiles—and well he may:
  The life-caged linnet sings.

Vickery thinks the time will come
  To go for what is his;
But hovering, unseen hands at home
  Will hold him where he is.

There's a golden word that he never tells
  And a gift that he will not show.
All to be given to some one else—
  And Vickery shall not know.

BON VOYAGE

Child of a line accurst
And old as Troy,
Bringer of best and worst
In wild alloy—
Light, like a linnet first,
He sang for joy.

Thrall to the gilded ease
Of every day,
Mocker of all degrees
And always gay,
Child of the Cyclades
And of Broadway—

Laughing and half divine
The boy began,
Drunk with a woodland wine
Thessalian:
But there was rue to twine
The pipes of Pan.

Therefore he skipped and flew
The more along,
Vivid and always new
And always wrong,
Knowing his only clew
A siren song.

Careless of each and all
He gave and spent:
Feast or a funeral
He laughed and went,
Laughing to be so small
In the event.

Told of his own deceit
By many a tongue,
Flayed for his long defeat
By being young,
Lured by the fateful sweet
Of songs unsung—

Knowing it in his heart,
But knowing not
The secret of an art
That few forgot,
He played the twinkling part
That was his lot.

And when the twinkle died,
As twinkles do,
He pushed himself aside
And out of view:
Out with the wind and tide,
Before we knew.

THE COMPANION

Let him answer as he will,
Or be lightsome as he may,
Now nor after shall he say
Worn-out words enough to kill,
Or to lull down by their craft,
Doubt, that was born yesterday,
When he lied and when she laughed.

Let him find another name
For the starlight on the snow,

Let him teach her till she know
That all seasons are the same,
And all sheltered ways are fair,—
Still, wherever she may go,
Doubt will have a dwelling there.

ATHERTON'S GAMBIT

The master played the bishop's pawn,
For jest, while Atherton looked on;
The master played this way and that,
And Atherton, amazed thereat,
Said "Now I have a thing in view
That will enlighten one or two,
And make a difference or so
In what it is they do not know."

The morning stars together sang
And forth a mighty music rang—
Not heard by many, save as told
Again through magic manifold,
By such a few as have to play
For others, in the Master's way,
The music that the Master made
When all the morning stars obeyed.

Atherton played the bishop's pawn
While more than one or two looked on;
Atherton played this way and that,
And many a friend, amused thereat,
Went on about his business
Nor cared for Atherton the less;
A few stood longer by the game,
With Atherton to them the same.

The morning stars are singing still,
To crown, to challenge, and to kill;
And if perforce there falls a voice
On pious ears that have no choice
Except to urge an erring hand
To wreak its homage on the land,
Who of us that is worth his while
Will, if he listen, more than smile?

Who of us, being what he is,
May scoff at others' ecstasies?
However we may shine to-day,
More-shining ones are on the way;
And so it were not wholly well
To be at odds with Azrael,—
Nor were it kind of any one
To sing the end of Atherton.

FOR A DEAD LADY

No more with overflowing light
Shall fill the eyes that now are faded,
Nor shall another's fringe with night
Their woman-hidden world as they did.
No more shall quiver down the days
The flowing wonder of her ways,
Whereof no language may requite
The shifting and the many-shaded.

The grace, divine, definitive,
Clings only as a faint forestalling;
The laugh that love could not forgive
Is hushed, and answers to no calling;
The forehead and the little ears
Have gone where Saturn keeps the years;
The breast where roses could not live
Has done with rising and with falling.

The beauty, shattered by the laws
That have creation in their keeping,
No longer trembles at applause,
Or over children that are sleeping;
And we who delve in beauty's lore
Know all that we have known before
Of what inexorable cause
Makes Time so vicious in his reaping.

TWO GARDENS IN LINNDALE

Two brothers, Oakes and Oliver,
Two gentle men as ever were,
Would roam no longer, but abide
In Linndale, where their fathers died,
And each would be a gardener.

"Now first we fence the garden through,
With this for me and that for you,"
Said Oliver.—"Divine!" said Oakes,
"And I, while I raise artichokes,
Will do what I was born to do."

"But this is not the soil, you know,"
Said Oliver, "to make them grow:
The parent of us, who is dead,
Compassionately shook his head
Once on a time and told me so."

"I hear you, gentle Oliver,"
Said Oakes, "and in your character
I find as fair a thing indeed
As ever bloomed and ran to seed
Since Adam was a gardener.

"Still, whatsoever I find there,
Forgive me if I do not share
The knowing gloom that you take on
Of one who doubted and is done:
For chemistry meets every prayer."

"Sometimes a rock will meet a plough,"
Said Oliver; "but anyhow
'Tis here we are, 'tis here we live,
With each to take and each to give:
There's no room for a quarrel now.

"I leave you in all gentleness
To science and a ripe success.
Now God be with you, brother Oakes,
With you and with your artichokes:
You have the vision, more or less."

"By fate, that gives to me no choice,
I have the vision and the voice:
Dear Oliver, believe in me,
And we shall see what we shall see;
Henceforward let us both rejoice."

"But first, while you have joy to spare
We'll plant a little here and there;
And if you be not in the wrong,
We'll sing together such a song
As no man yet sings anywhere."

They planted and with fruitful eyes
Attended each his enterprise.
"Now days will come and days will go,
And many a way be found, we know,"
Said Oakes, "and we shall sing, likewise."

"The days will go, the years will go,
And many a song be sung, we know,"
Said Oliver; "and if there be
Good harvesting for you and me,
Who cares if we sing loud or low?"

They planted once, and twice, and thrice,
Like amateurs in paradise;
And every spring, fond, foiled, elate,
Said Oakes, "We are in tune with Fate:
One season longer will suffice."

Year after year 'twas all the same:
With none to envy, none to blame,
They lived along in innocence,
Nor ever once forgot the fence,
Till on a day the Stranger came.

He came to greet them where they were,
And he too was a Gardener:
He stood between these gentle men,
He stayed a little while, and then
The land was all for Oliver.

'Tis Oliver who tills alone
Two gardens that are now his own;
'Tis Oliver who sows and reaps
And listens, while the other sleeps,
For songs undreamed of and unknown.

'Tis he, the gentle anchorite,
Who listens for them day and night;
But most he hears them in the dawn,
When from his trees across the lawn
Birds ring the chorus of the light.

He cannot sing without the voice,
But he may worship and rejoice
For patience in him to remain,
The chosen heir of age and pain,
Instead of Oakes—who had no choice.

'Tis Oliver who sits beside
The other's grave at eventide,
And smokes, and wonders what new race
Will have two gardens, by God's grace,
In Linndale, where their fathers died.

And often, while he sits and smokes,
He sees the ghost of gentle Oakes
Uprooting, with a restless hand,
Soft, shadowy flowers in a land
Of asphodels and artichokes.

THE REVEALER

THE REVEALER

(ROOSEVELT)

He turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcase of the lion . . . And the men of the city said unto him, What is sweeter than honey? and what is stronger than a lion?—*Judges*, 14.

The palms of Mammon have disowned
The gift of our complacency;
The bells of ages have intoned
Again their rhythmic irony;
And from the shadow, suddenly,
'Mid echoes of decrepit rage,
The seer of our necessity
Confronts a Tyrian heritage.

Equipped with unobscured intent
He smiles with lions at the gate,
Acknowledging the compliment
Like one familiar with his fate;
The lions, having time to wait,
Perceive a small cloud in the skies,
Whereon they look, disconsolate,
With scared, reactionary eyes.

A shadow falls upon the land,—
They sniff, and they are like to roar;
For they will never understand
What they have never seen before.
They march in order to the door,
Not knowing the best thing to seek,
Nor caring if the gods restore
The lost composite of the Greek.

The shadow fades, the light arrives,
And ills that were concealed are seen;
The combs of long-defended hives
Now drip dishonored and unclean;
No Nazarite or Nazarene
Compels our questioning to prove
The difference that is between
Dead lions—or the sweet thereof.

But not for lions, live or dead,
Except as we are all as one,
Is he the world's accredited
Revealer of what we have done;
What You and I and Anderson
Are still to do is his reward;
If we go back when he is gone—
There is an Angel with a Sword.

He cannot close again the doors
That now are shattered for our sake;
He cannot answer for the floors
We crowd on, or for walls that shake;
He cannot wholly undertake
The cure of our immunity;
He cannot hold the stars, or make
Of seven years a century.

So Time will give us what we earn
Who flaunt the handful for the whole,
And leave us all that we may learn
Who read the surface for the soul;
And we'll be steering to the goal,
For we have said so to our sons:
When we who ride can pay the toll,
Time humors the far-seeing ones.

Down to our nose's very end
We see, and are invincible,—
Too vigilant to comprehend
The scope of what we cannot sell;
But while we seem to know as well
As we know dollars, or our skins,
The Titan may not always tell
Just where the boundary begins.

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